Uta Kapp

How Women Use Artificial Intelligence Before They Feel Ready

The World Does Not Wait for You.

Imprint

Uta Kapp
The World Does Not Wait for You.
How Women Use Artificial Intelligence Before They Feel Ready
Translated from the German original, *Die Welt wartet nicht auf dich.*

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Prologue

What Was in Me Before I Knew It

An Honest Introduction

> *What is truly yours does not wait. It presses. It looks for a way out. It knocks, quietly but steadily, on the door we built ourselves.*

* * *

I believed for a long time that I did not need much space.

Not because anyone had told me so. But because at some point I simply knew it, the way you know things you never consciously learned. I was there. I performed. I contributed. But being loud, taking up room, showing myself before I was fully prepared did not seem necessary. Perhaps not even appropriate.

I called it modesty.

I called it restraint. Professionalism. Sometimes even good sense.

I was good at explaining myself that way. And I was even better at believing it.

What I did not see back then: behind it stood a deep, quiet belief that many women know without ever having put it into words.

I am unimportant.
I do not have to be loud.
I do not have to be heard.

This is not a dramatic feeling. It is a quiet one. It whispers while you smile and nod and do good work. Sometimes it even sounds like a virtue.

And that is exactly why it is so effective.

* * *

There is an image that has stayed with me for decades.

A river that wants to flow. And a dam, not built by others but by me. Stone by stone, year after year, from the material of this quiet belief: This is not for me. I do not have to stand at the front. Others can do it better.

The water backed up. It looked for other paths. Sometimes it simply seeped away.

On the outside I looked competent. Committed. Reliable. And all of that was true. But the deepest part of me, the voice that had something to say, that wanted to lead, that wanted to be seen, was waiting.

For the right moment. For more preparation. For a permission that never came.

Only through my work with my teacher Claire Zammit did I understand what was behind this waiting.

Not weakness. Not laziness. Not a lack of ambition.

But a learned silence that had disguised itself as modesty.

* * *

Claire Zammit has spent more than two decades researching what holds women back.

Not women who lack education. Not women who had no opportunities. Women who seem to have everything it takes, and who still stand at an invisible boundary. Her contribution to the research is profound: she was one of the first to describe how women are held back not by outer obstacles alone, but by a very specific inner pattern, which she calls the inner glass ceiling.

When I first heard the term, I said: I know this.

Not from books. From my body.

> *The inner glass ceiling is not a concept. It is a feeling. The feeling just before you open your mouth, and then do not open it after all.*

Zammit showed me something that changed my life: this ceiling is not part of me. It is something I learned to carry. And what was learned can be unlearned.

Claire Zammit, Ph.D. in Transformative Learning and Change, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, 2017.

* * *

I want to tell you what it took.

The first thing was listening.

Not to my achievements, my goals, my next steps. But to what lay beneath. Listening without judgment. That was the hardest part.

The second was understanding.

Not changing, at first only understanding. Where does this voice come from? What did it protect? And in the moment the self punishment stops, space opens up.

The third was allowing.

Allowing myself to be visible, in my imperfection. To speak before I know everything. To begin before I am ready. Because every permission changed something. Quietly. Permanently.

The fourth was community.

Women who know the same thing. Who answer: I know this feeling. And I see that you are more than you believe. That changes something no course can change.

* * *

And then came AI.

The biggest, fastest, most consequential wave of technology I have experienced in my career.

This time I knew the voice. And I knew: it does not have the last word.

A study by the IAB and the Initiative D21 from 2026 shows: women in Germany use AI 16 percentage points less often than men. Even with the same education, the same profession and the same income, a gap remains. The numbers describe from the outside what I know from the inside.

> *This gap is not a competence problem. It is a permission problem. And permission is something only you can give yourself.*

IAB / Initiative D21: "Digital Gender Gap, Focus 2026: Artificial Intelligence", n=4,806, Germany.

* * *

This book grew out of my own development. Not out of what I know. Out of what I have lived through.

Today I am someone who knows: the strength was always there. The question is never: Do I have this strength? The question is: Do I allow myself to live it?

> *This inner development, the listening and looking, the understanding, the allowing, the community, is not the preparation for the digital world. It is the way in.*

The AI wave is real. And it needs you, not despite your inner story, but with it.

Chapter One

The First Wave

Cape Town, 1981, and what never let go of me

> *Every wave I have surfed has not only carried me forward, it has transformed me. Not because the technology changed me. But because I had to face it in order to surf it.*

* * *

The sea always has a logic, even when you do not yet understand it.

You stand on the shore. Somewhere out there, far away, almost invisible, a wave is growing. Most people on the beach turn around and look the other way. Only you notice that something is changing. The water pulls back for a moment. The horizon lifts.

I learned early to start running.

Not only on the water, although there too. The sea in South Africa taught me early what a wave is before it arrives. How to feel the right moment. How to go with it instead of against it. That lesson has never left me.

* * *

It was 1981. I was studying computer science at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. A young country in turbulent times, and I was a

young woman who had learned to love the sea.

That year the IBM PC, the original model that set the worldwide standard for personal computers, was born.

The experienced programmers I knew laughed.

A toy. Not a real computer. Nothing you could seriously work with.

I sat quietly and thought: This is the beginning of something. Not rational. Not analyzed. It was a feeling that sat deeper than reason.

* * *

Three years later, in 1984, I started my first job, at Bosch in Stuttgart.

And then it stood there. An IBM PC. One of the first ever used in a large German company.

I was supposed to program it.

I still remember the feeling of typing the first lines of code. The soft clicking of the keys. The green letters on the black screen. The waiting to see whether the program would run.

It ran.

I had caught my first wave.

* * *

But let me be honest, because honesty is what this book is about. Every wave demanded things of me that sit much deeper than code or skills. That I become visible. That I get started before I am ready. That I make mistakes in front of other people.

> *If I am not perfect, I will not be taken seriously.*

This conviction did not fall from the sky. It was cultivated, through a hundred small moments in which women's mistakes were judged differently from men's mistakes.

* * *

Then came the internet. And with it new waves.

I was the mother of two small children. And still something whispered in me: Go. This is your next wave.

I listened. I became one of the first trainers for new digital technologies in Europe.

Because that was the silent law I had given myself: Show no uncertainty. Always be one step ahead. What I did not yet understand: this strategy cost me the permission to show myself, to really show myself. To be audible, even while I was still learning.

* * *

Today I see something I could not see then: the technology was never the hardest part.

The hardest part was always what went on inside me, while I learned. While I failed. While I entered rooms that did not feel made for me.

> *Women do not avoid risks because they are fragile. They avoid them because they have learned to equate imperfection with unworthiness.*

This is the glass ceiling in the mind. Not the ceiling others build above you. The ceiling you carry yourself.

* * *

And now a new wave stands on the horizon.

16 percentage points separate women and men in AI use in Germany. Even when you factor out education, income and profession, a gap remains.

This book is for the woman who senses that a wave is coming, and who hesitates because she has learned that wave surfing is made for others.

> *The wave does not wait. But you do not have to be perfect to surf it. You only have to begin.*

* * *

I have surfed many waves. Not always elegantly. But I went.

And every time something in me changed. Not only what I could do. But what I believed about myself.

The first wave showed me what is possible.

The next wave asks me who I want to be.

The wave after that, the one you are looking at right now, asks the same of you.

Chapter Two

The Glass Ceiling in the Mind

What sits deeper than any boundary others build around us

> *There is a ceiling you cannot see, because you are holding it yourself. Not out of weakness. But because you were taught that you need it.*

* * *

Imagine a woman.

She is intelligent. She is experienced. In her profession she has achieved things others would be proud of. When her friends need advice, they come to her. When her colleagues are stuck, she finds a way.

And yet.

When she stands before a new project, something unfamiliar, bigger, digital, she pauses. A second too long. A heartbeat in which a voice rises that she thinks she knows:

Are you sure you can do this?
Who gives you the right to stand up front?

You are too much. Too loud. Too demanding.
Wait a little longer. Prepare more.

The woman I am describing is not just anybody.

She could be me, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, last week. She could be your colleague, your sister, your friend. She is probably smarter than she thinks. More capable than she feels. Further along than she allows herself to see.

This voice that holds her back has a name.

Claire Zammit calls it the inner blockade, that invisible boundary that is not set from the outside but that we carry within ourselves.

* * *

You may have heard of the glass ceiling, the outer one.

The invisible boundary that has held women back in organizations. The barrier you could not see but that was there all the same, in salary negotiations, in promotion decisions, in the question of whose ideas were heard in the meeting and whose were not.

This outer boundary is real. I have felt it, in seminar rooms, in projects, in moments when someone said exactly what I had said two minutes earlier, and received applause for it.

But there is another ceiling.

One that no study measures directly and no law addresses directly. One that is much closer. That you cannot see from outside, because it holds from within.

The inner barrier, as Claire Zammit calls it, is the conviction that sits deeper than any employer, any structure, any social norm. Because it has become your own voice. Your own voice, saying:

> *Not you. Not now. Not like this.*
> *You are not good enough.*

* * *

How does this voice arise?

Not through a single moment. Not through a single experience. It arises through a hundred small moments that layer over years, like sediment on the sea floor, invisible but heavy.

It arises in the moment a girl shares an idea with enthusiasm, and the reaction around her is skepticism, amusement, a quiet roll of the eyes.

It arises in every praise that ended with a “but”. In every situation where you had to explain more than others to take the same place. In every piece of feedback that did not say “You could do more” but “You are too much”.

Too ambitious. Too direct. Too loud. Not modest enough.

And at some point, quietly, imperceptibly, this outer experience becomes an inner conviction:

“If I am not perfect, I am not good enough.”

And at the same time: *“If I am too much, I will be rejected.”* Two messages. One cage.

This is the core of this glass ceiling in the mind. Not laziness. Not lack of interest. Not lack of intelligence.

It is the learned equation between imperfection and unworthiness, and between strength and danger.

* * *

It took me many years to recognize this equation in myself.

I was good at hiding it, from others and from myself. I had developed strategies that protected me: I was always prepared. I always knew more than necessary. I always got into new technology waves early, before the rooms got tight, before I had to prove myself.

That was not a conscious strategy. It was survival intelligence.

But the voice did not disappear. It only waited. It waited for every moment when I stumbled, doubted, made a mistake. And then it rose:

> *You see? You are not good enough.*
> *You should have known better.*

And on other days, when I had ventured too far, had spoken too clearly, it was the other voice:

> *You are too much.*
> *You overwhelm the others.*
> *Make yourself smaller.*

I now call this, because now I can name it, the inner critic with a diploma. It sounds reasonable. It even sounds caring. But in truth it protects you from something quite different: from showing yourself completely.

* * *

In her doctoral thesis and in more than two decades of work with women from all over the world, Claire Zammit found something decisive:

The inner ceiling, this invisible limit on one's own expression, has several faces. And it appears not only as "I am not good enough". It appears just as often as "I am too much".

Both messages do the same thing: they keep women from bringing themselves in fully.

The pattern looks like this:

- **Perfectionism as a shield:** "I will show myself only when I am ready." Because if I am not perfect, I am not good enough.
- **Restraint as politeness:** "I would rather not take up space." Because if I am too much, I will be rejected.
- **Seeking permission:** "I wait until someone says I am good enough." No one comes.
- **Invisibility as safety:** "If I do not show myself, I cannot fail." But I cannot win either.
- **Postponing as strategy:** "Next week, next month, when things are calmer." Things do not get calmer.

Do you recognize one of these?

I know them all, from my own story and from hundreds of conversations with women I have accompanied. Women who were brilliant. Who had everything they needed, except the belief that they had it.

* * *

And then comes AI.

A new wave. Faster than all before. Bigger. More inevitable.

And the inner blockade rises, with new strength, new arguments:

This is technology. This is not for me.
I am not a tech person.
I would only be in the way.
The others can do this much better.
I am too late. Too old. Too little.

Sometimes also:

If I get involved now, it will show that I do not know what I am doing.
I am too much for this room.

The researchers at the Initiative D21 and the IAB have measured this waiting. 16 percentage points separate women and men in AI use in Germany. The difference remains even when all outer factors are factored out.

What remains when you factor out everything outer?

The inner.

This glass ceiling in the mind is the gap within the gap. It is the part of the Gender AI Gap that no study names directly, because it does not fit into numbers. But it is real. I see it every day.

* * *

Here is what I have learned after decades:

The inner barrier is not a truth about you.

It is a story you learned to believe. From real moments of criticism, rejection, judgment. It is understandable. It once protected you.

But it is no longer true.

Neither the part that says: You are not good enough.

Nor the part that says: You are too much.

Both are voices from a past that no longer has to determine what you do.

> *Beliefs that were learned can begin to dissolve, not through willpower, but through the precise, loving illumination of the pattern.*

This is the method I am trained in.

And that is the heart of this book: not only to understand the outer waves of technology, but to surf the inner wave that rises when we face them.

* * *

Let me tell you about a moment.

I was sitting in a seminar room in the early years of the Agile movement. I was training a team. A woman, smart, experienced, with precise thoughts, offered an idea. She spoke calmly, almost hesitantly. The room listened politely.

Three minutes later someone else said exactly the same thing, with more volume, more gesture, more conviction.

The room nodded. Someone said: Good idea.

The woman said nothing. I watched her face, that moment in which she swallowed and made herself a little smaller. In which the inner voice probably said:

> *You see? You are not good enough.*
> *When you say it, it does not count.*

Perhaps it was also the other voice:

> *You are too direct. You should have put it more gently.*
> *You are too much.*

Hepeating is what this phenomenon is called, when a woman contributes an idea that is passed over until someone else repeats it.

It is real. It is painful. And it leaves traces.

But here is what I now know:

The outer injustice is one thing. What it leaves in us, the inner pattern we develop from it, is the other. And the other we can change.

* * *

The glass ceiling in the mind is not your fate.

It is your starting point.

Every woman I accompany in my work arrives with a version of this inner ceiling. Some know it. Some suspect it. Some are confronted with it only in the middle of a conversation, and then realize how long they have lived beneath it.

The moment a woman truly sees her inner barrier, without shame, is one of the most powerful moments I know.

Because in that moment something becomes clear:

> *That is not me. That is a pattern. And patterns can change.*

That is the beginning.

Not of perfection. Not of boundless self confidence.

But of the freedom to go despite the doubt.

To see the wave and run anyway.

Chapter Three

Waiting Has a Price

What we lose while we wait for the right moment

> *Waiting feels like preparation. But most of the time it is the most consequential decision we never consciously made.*

* * *

There is a bill we rarely open.

Not a bill in euros. But one that writes itself into body and soul, into self confidence and courage, into the picture we carry of ourselves.

The bill of waiting.

Waiting feels like a neutral decision. Like reason. Even like responsibility: you prepare, you think it over, you make sure you are ready when the moment comes.

But waiting is not a neutral decision. Waiting is a decision with consequences that only show up later.

* * *

I know a woman, I will call her Miriam, who has known for three years that she wants to take her business into the digital world.

Miriam is intelligent. Miriam is experienced. Miriam has clients who love her, and an offer that truly helps. And Miriam waits.

She waits until she knows more. Until she feels more secure. Until she feels ready.

Three years.

I ask her: What has the waiting given you?

She thinks. Then she says:

> *No more security. No more clarity either.*
> *I think the waiting has made me more tired. Not calmer.*

That is the price we rarely name.

Not what we postpone. But what the postponing does to us.

* * *

Miriam's waiting has a name.

In psychology it is called imposter syndrome, the feeling of being a fraud despite real competence, whom others will eventually see through. The conviction that you do not deserve your place, that you are only pretending, that the next step will expose you.

Studies show: women experience it more often and more deeply than men. And it shows up in a very specific way:

> *Women apply for a job when they meet 100 percent of the requirements. Men apply when they meet 60 percent.*

The same gap appears everywhere.

Women speak up in discussions only when they are sure. Men speak up when they have an opinion.

Women open a new digital tool when they feel they fully understand it. Men open it to see what happens.

This is not a failure. It is a learned pattern.

And in the world of artificial intelligence, this pattern costs women more space, more influence, more opportunity every day.

* * *

What do we lose while we wait?

Not in euros. But in what counts more deeply.

- **We lose strength.** Not through doing, but through not doing. The knowledge that we could have started long ago is a quiet drain of energy that adds up over months and years.
- **We lose trust in ourselves.** Every time we wait and know that we could, a quiet verdict hardens: I am someone who waits.
- **We lose our voice** in conversations that are happening right now. Every idea we do not share. Every contribution we do not write. They are missing, in our surroundings, in our field, in the world.
- **We lose experience** that only comes from doing. Competence does not grow from preparation alone. It arises from application, from

mistakes, from wrestling with the unknown.

- **We lose the connection to what drives us.** Our own strength, what Claire Zammit calls deep feminine power, does not unfold in waiting. It unfolds in doing.

I do not say this to create pressure.

I say it because Miriam deserved to hear it sooner. Because you should hear it now.

* * *

The D21 study measured something that made me very thoughtful.

16 percentage points separate women and men in AI use in Germany. Even when all outer factors are factored out, education, income, profession, 8 points remain. Structural. Unexplained by the obvious.

Lena Sophie Müller, CEO of the Initiative D21, says:

> *Patterns that arise early are hard to break.*

Waiting is not a harmless pause. Waiting is the formation of a pattern.

And imposter syndrome is exactly this pattern, not as a feeling that shows up now and then, but as an inner architecture that produces the same decision again and again: Not yet. Not ready yet. Not enough yet.

* * *

I want to tell you about an experience that showed me how deep these patterns run.

In the 1990s I already had my own experience with agile ways of working, in the computer game industry, where fast iterations and self organized teams were common practice long before anyone called it

“agile”. I knew the approach. I believed in it. I began to train it.

I did not wait. I did it.

And still I experienced something my male colleagues did not experience in this way.

There was an in house course at a company in the middle of an agile transformation. The course was difficult. The company was in a deep crisis of change, the participants were overwhelmed and guarded, the energy in the room was heavy. It was one of the most demanding courses of my working life. The feedback was accordingly bad.

I took it with me. I doubted. I asked myself whether I was not good enough.

Ten years later, when I had begun my inner work in the meantime and had dissolved deep convictions in myself, a man came to one of my advanced courses. I did not know him.

He said:

> *I was in a course with you ten years ago.*
> *It was the best course of my life.*

I was silent.

It was the same course.

And in that moment I understood something I had not been able to see for a long time: I had been a pure projection screen back then. The company in crisis, the overwhelmed participants, they had projected their fear, their anger, their overwhelm onto me. And I had taken it personally.

This happens to my male colleagues. But less often. And less intensely.

Women are more often the projection screen, for feelings that have nothing to do with them. And because they have learned to read criticism as truth about themselves, it hits deeper.

* * *

But this moment about the course led me to something even deeper.

In the years before, I had begun to work on my own inner blockades. Not superficially, but truly listening for where my feeling of worthlessness came from.

I grew up in a German farming family.

There the same applied as in many families of that generation: women were not counted. They were not entitled to an inheritance. Their opinion carried less weight. Their place was defined, and it was not at the front.

That was not ill will. That was the world in which these people lived.

But it left something in me, a deep, quiet conviction that felt like truth: I am worth less. My voice counts for less. I have to justify myself when I take up space.

This conviction was not an opinion. It was engraved.

When I began to really see it, to hear where it came from, what function it once had, why it no longer held true today, something changed.

Not at once. Not completely. But noticeably.

And then something happened that stays with me to this day:

> *When I dissolved the inner blockade, the mirror on the outside changed. The man who came after ten years and said: It was the best course of my life, could have come earlier. But I could not have heard him.*

That is the secret of inner work:

It changes not only how we feel. It changes what we perceive. Which feedback we receive. How we are seen in rooms.

Imposter syndrome does not only hold us back. It also distorts how we read the world.

* * *

There is a principle in software development: Conway's Law.

It says that the structure of a system mirrors the communication structure of the people who built it.

> *When women are missing, they are missing in the system too, in its values, its blind spots, its decision logic.*

This applies to AI in a special way. Artificial intelligence learns from data, from texts, patterns, decisions that people have made. If the people who shape these systems are predominantly male, the result is an AI that carries the perspective of half of humanity only incompletely.

The waiting of women is not a private matter. It is a structural one.

* * *

Back to Miriam.

At the end of our conversation I asked her: What would be possible if you started today, unfinished, unsure, but you start?

She was silent. Then she said:

> *I think I would be a different woman.*
> *I think I could have shown my women that it can be done.*

The waiting has not only a personal price.

It has a price for all the women Miriam could accompany, if she had started herself.

Every woman who waits holds back, without meaning to, the women to whom she could have shown: It can be done. Even when you are not ready. Even when you make mistakes.

Claire Zammit once said:

> *You cannot become you, alone. Women unfold their strength in the presence of other women.*
>
> Dr. Claire Zammit

Waiting breaks exactly this chain.

* * *

I am not writing this chapter to persuade you.

I am writing it because you already know, somewhere, very quietly, what waiting costs. In energy. In sleep. In the quiet feeling that rises when you see others begin and you are still standing.

This feeling does not lie.

It is not a reproach. It is an invitation.

It is not worth waiting until the world changes.

The world changes, it just does not wait for you.

And you are too important to wait any longer.

Chapter Four

The North Star

Why a new identity achieves more than any healing

> *It is not enough to recognize the blockade. You have to ask yourself: Who do I want to be, beyond everything I was taught to believe?*

* * *

I had learned early to look at my own blockades.

Long before my work with Claire Zammit. Long before I had the language for what was going on in me. I had learned to listen, to the voices that said: You are not good enough. You are too much. I had learned to name them, to understand where they came from.

And that helped.

But it was not enough.

I noticed that I was diving deeper and deeper into the analysis of the blockade, and still stood in the same place. I understood why the pattern was there. I knew its history. And it stayed.

Only much later did I understand why.

* * *

Recognizing a blockade does not dissolve it.

That is perhaps the most important insight of my own development, and one Claire Zammit was able to explain to me with a depth that changed everything:

You cannot grow out of an old pattern by looking at it ever more closely. You grow out of it by bringing in something bigger. A new identity. A direction. A picture of who you want to be, beyond everything you learned to believe.

Literally: you need a North Star.

> *It is not enough to dig around in patterns. Transformation does not arise from deeper analysis, but from a new identity that is bigger than the blockade.*

That sounds simple. It is not.

For this North Star cannot be grasped with the mind. It cannot be derived from the realm of the known. It does not come from what we already know, what we have already done, already achieved, already believe ourselves to be.

It comes from something else.

* * *

When women set goals, they are often too small.

Not because women want too little. But because goals come from the realm of the known.

A goal is what we can imagine, based on what we have already experienced. It is the extension of the known into the future.

But real transformation, the kind that truly leads a woman into a new version of herself, does not happen through the extension of the known. It happens through a step into the unknown.

> *Goals come from what we already know. But the unknown, what we are truly called to, cannot be grasped with the mind. It can be felt.*

Jean Houston, one of the great thinkers of the human potential movement, spoke of the quantum level, that depth within us that is not accessible through analysis but through another kind of perception. A perception that goes beyond the rational.

She did not mean mysticism. She meant a form of creativity and connection that arises when we stop thinking and start feeling, what truly lives in us, what is truly possible, who we could truly be.

* * *

The patterns that were programmed into women are deeply cultural.

I experienced this in my own story. The conviction that I am worth less, that certain rooms do not belong to me, that I have to justify myself when I take up space, did not come from my personal psychology alone. It came from millennia of cultural conditioning.

And this conditioning runs deep.

So deep that you cannot fully dissolve it with personal work alone. You have to introduce something bigger than the blockade itself.

A counter design.

A new identity.

The genius self, as Claire Zammit calls it, is not the self after healing. It is not the self that finally has no more blockades. It is the self that lives, acts and decides from a larger vision.

Not the repaired self. The created one.

* * *

Let me make this concrete.

A woman who says: “My goal is to win more clients this year” has a goal from the known.

A woman who senses: “My vision is to accompany women worldwide in finding their voice and shaping the digital future” has a North Star.

The difference is not the size of the ambition. The difference is the direction of the force.

A goal pulls us forward in a direction we already know. A North Star pulls us in a direction we do not yet know, and it gives us the strength to enter the unknown.

You need a direction, but no defined goal.

And you do not have to know this direction. You have to feel it.

> *The North Star does not come from the head. It comes from the heart. And once it is there, it becomes stronger than any blockade.*

* * *

In this context I understand artificial intelligence differently than most.

AI is not the goal. It is the tool.

A tool for a bigger vision. For a purpose in life that is bigger than any single task, bigger than any single project, bigger than the solution of a problem.

When a woman sees AI only as an efficiency tool, as a way to get things done faster, she stays in the realm of the known. She optimizes what she already does.

But when a woman uses AI in the service of a bigger vision, as an amplifier of her own voice, as a bridge between her and the world she wants to shape, everything changes.

Then AI is not intimidating. Then AI is inviting.

Then the question is no longer: Am I good enough for this technology?

But: What can I bring into the world with this technology that would not exist without me?

> *AI is the most powerful tool women have ever had to carry their vision into the world. But first the vision is needed.*

* * *

I want to tell you about my own North Star.

It did not arise through analysis. It did not arise by my understanding my blockades more deeply.

It arose in a moment of feeling.

I was sitting in a group of women, and I was asked: What would be possible if you stopped making yourself smaller?

And I felt something. Not thought, felt.

A picture arose. Not complete, not clear in every detail. But alive. A picture of what it would mean if women shaped the digital world, not as latecomers, not as exceptions, but as creators. With their intuition. Their ability to connect. Their sense for the human.

That was my North Star.

It has changed over the years. It has grown. But from the beginning it was bigger than any goal I would have set myself.

And it carried me through blockades I could not have overcome alone.

* * *

You do not need a perfect plan.

You do not need a clear strategy.

You do not need a complete answer to the question of where you are going.

You need a direction.

A direction that is bigger than your blockade. Bigger than your doubts. Bigger than everything you have learned to believe about yourself.

This direction cannot be found by thinking.

It arises in pausing. In listening. In asking with courage:

> *What would be possible if what is in me were truly allowed into the world?*

The answer to this question is your North Star.

And it is the only thing strong enough to blow up the glass ceiling in the mind from within.

Chapter Five

Why Women Need Each Other

And what happens when they find each other

> *A system needs enough women for feminine energy to truly come alive. Not one. Not two. Enough.*

* * *

There is an image that has stayed with me for years.

It was in one of my early Scrum trainings. We had asked the participants to organize themselves into teams. The male trainers insisted on “diverse” groups, which in practice meant: one woman, four men.

I watched what happened.

The women in these groups behaved in a very specific way: they spoke less. They made suggestions more cautiously. They checked their statements several times before voicing them. And when their ideas were passed over, which happened often, they withdrew even further.

I made a suggestion: Let the women choose themselves whom they want to work with.

Almost all chose a group in which at least one other woman sat.

What happened next changed my work forever.

* * *

The groups dominated by women, or balanced, flourished.

Not because the women suddenly became smarter, they had been all along. But because they stopped censoring their intelligence.

Ideas came faster. Contradictions became more constructive. Mistakes were named more openly, and so solved faster. The energy was different. Warmer. More open. More creative.

The groups with only male participants? They worked. But they worked differently, more hierarchically, more competitively, with more energy spent on proving than on discovering.

As a trainer I felt the difference immediately. The energy became more fluid when women were no longer the only one in the room.

That was no coincidence.

* * *

Zammit says it in one sentence:

> *You cannot become you, alone.*

I heard this sentence many times before I truly understood it.

It does not mean that women cannot exist without men. It means something deeper: certain parts of themselves, certain strengths, certain qualities, certain versions of themselves, unfold fully only in the presence

of other women.

Not because men are not good companions. But because there is something that happens only between women.

A kind of mirroring that goes deeper.

A kind of recognizing that requires no training.

A kind of giving permission that needs no words.

* * *

I remember the first moment I experienced this physically.

I was in a group of women, all experienced, all carrying the quiet burden of being the only one or one of the few. We had hardly spoken yet when I felt something in me relax.

Not because the women said anything in particular. But because for the first time in a very long time I was not thinking about how I came across.

I did not have to prove myself.

I did not have to formulate perfectly.

I did not have to make sure my uncertainty was not read as incompetence.

I could simply be there.

It was as if, after a long walk, you take off your shoes.

The ground was still the same. But the contact was different.

This feeling, this breathing in the presence of other women, is not a luxury.

It is a condition.

A condition for women to come into their strength.

* * *

A study by the Boston Consulting Group and the Technical University of Munich, “The Mix That Matters”, 2017, shows: when more than 20 percent of leadership positions are held by women, organizational creativity rises significantly.

Not a little. Significantly.

This is not just a nice result for equality reports. It points to something fundamental:

Feminine energy, intuition, empathy, relational thinking, the ability to tolerate contradiction without cementing hierarchies, unfolds only when enough carriers of this energy are in the room.

One woman alone in a system hardly changes the system. She adapts. She survives. Often very skillfully.

But she does not bring her full strength, because the room does not allow it.

> *A system does not change through one woman who adapts. It changes through women who strengthen one another.*

* * *

This applies, and especially, to the digital space.

When women are missing online, they are missing with their perspective, their questions, their way of formulating problems.

When women are missing in AI development teams, systems arise that carry the blind spots of their builders.

When women hesitate to raise their voice in digital conversations, these conversations are held without them.

And the crucial point is:

> *Women hesitate less when they see other women do it.*
> *Visibility creates permission.*

When a woman sees another woman, not a perfect one, not an all knowing one, but a real, learning, sometimes stumbling woman, show herself digitally and stand at the front, the inner voice grows quieter.

Not because someone explained something to her. But because she saw something.

* * *

I want to tell you about a woman I will call “Katharina”.

Katharina had been established in her field for years. She had knowledge others did not have. And she had, for months, the feeling that she could do more. Write more. Share more. Be more visible.

But every time she wrote a text, read it once more, found it not good enough, and closed the window.

She came into one of my groups. A small group of women who were all working with similar blockades.

In the third session, very quietly, Katharina read a text aloud.

It was not perfect. It was unfinished. But it was real, in a way that touched you immediately.

The other women listened. And then they told her what they had heard. Not what she should improve. What they had recognized in her.

Katharina was silent. Then she said:

> *I thought the text was not good enough.*
> *I never thought it could touch anyone.*

The following week she published it.

Not because she had suddenly become brave. But because other women had shown her what was in her that she could not yet see herself.

* * *

Zammit speaks of a quality that women can give one another and that hardly arises anywhere else in this way:

Being mirrored.

Not the confirmation of what you already think. But the seeing of a strength or ability in another woman that she does not yet recognize as such.

This act requires no expertise. It requires only truly listening, and then naming what you have heard.

In male dominated environments this mirroring is rarely offered. Not out of malice. Simply because it is not part of the repertoire.

Among women it often arises by itself.

> *We see ourselves in each other. And in what we see, we begin to believe what is possible.*

* * *

This has direct consequences for the AI wave.

If we want women to use AI, we need more than tutorials and explainer videos.

We need spaces where women learn together. Where a woman sees how another, not an expert, not a perfect one, but one like her, opens a tool and tries it and makes mistakes and continues.

We need spaces where the question “Am I good enough?” may be asked aloud, because everyone else is asking it too.

We need spaces where stumbling is normal. Where no one has to prove that she already knows what she is just learning.

That is the space I create.

Not because I think women need protection.

But because I know from my own experience, and from decades in mixed and women dominated rooms, that in certain contexts women grow faster, think deeper and act more boldly.

Not because they are better.

But because they allow themselves to be themselves.

* * *

I want to close with a thought that has accompanied me for years.

I have gone through four decades of technology, mostly as one of the few women in the room. I have experienced what that costs. And I have experienced what becomes possible when that is different.

In groups where women were among themselves or in the majority, I saw something I will not forget:

When women feel safe, they become great.

Not louder. Not more aggressive. Greater.

They come into their strength.

They think further. They ask deeper. They risk more.

Not because the blockade has disappeared, but because they have stopped spending half their energy on protecting themselves.

Being in your strength is not the same as being strong. Being strong can also be exhausting. Being in your strength means: what is yours flows. The ideas come. The voice rises not from effort, but from fullness.

That is what community among women can achieve.

Not community as a retreat. As a source of strength.

Not as an alternative to the big world. As preparation for it.

The AI wave will be shaped by those who surf it early. I want women to be part of it, not as latecomers, but as creators.

For that to succeed, we need each other.

So that AI knows empathy.

So that the future of technology does not carry only half of human wisdom.

> *Women do not change the world by fighting alone, and exhausted, through male dominated rooms. They change it by walking together, and showing each other what is possible.*

Chapter Six

Your Wave

The first step that changes everything

> *You do not have to surf all waves at once. You only have to see this one, and start to run.*

* * *

This chapter is different from the previous ones.

The previous chapters looked. They named. They understood.

This chapter goes.

Not because understanding no longer matters. But because understanding alone does not surf a wave. At some point, and for most women I accompany that moment has long since come, knowledge has to turn into movement.

Not into perfect movement. Not into brave movement. Simply into movement.

This first step is the subject of this chapter.

Not because it is the biggest. But because it is the only one that counts, as long as it is still to come.

* * *

First I want to tell you something you may not expect:

The first step does not have to be good.

It does not have to be clear. It does not have to be well thought out. It does not have to point in the right direction.

It only has to exist.

I think of my own first steps, into the PC, into the internet, into Java, into Agile, into AI. None of them was elegant. None of them was complete. All of them felt smaller at the time than they appear in hindsight.

That is the nature of the first step.

From the outside it looks like nothing. From the inside it feels like everything.

> *The first step does not change the world. It changes who you are: someone who went.*

* * *

There is a difference I observe again and again in my work.

The difference between women who think about starting, and women who have started.

From the outside both look the same. Both have the same abilities. The same goals. The same intelligence.

But inside something is fundamentally different.

The woman who has started carries a new story about herself. Not the story “I plan to start someday.” But: “I am someone who goes.”

This story changes everything.

It changes how she makes the next decision. How she speaks about herself. How she interprets obstacles. How she deals with mistakes.

The first step is not the first step on the way to the goal.

It is the first step into a new identity.

* * *

Now I want to get concrete.

What does a first step in the digital world mean?

Not the perfect step. Not the bravest. The first.

A first step can be:

- Open an AI tool and ask a single question. Not the most important question. Any question.
- Write a LinkedIn post and publish it before you revise it for the fifth time.
- Ask a colleague how she uses AI in her work, without pretending you are already an expert.
- Take part in a conversation about AI, even if you feel you still know too little.
- Try one task you do daily with the support of AI.
- Say: “I am learning this right now,” instead of acting as if you should already know it.

None of these steps is big. None will change the AI world.

But each of them changes something in you.

Because it proves, not to others, but to yourself, that you are someone who goes.

* * *

I want to tell you about a woman I will call “Anne”.

Anne was convinced that she was not made for the digital world. She had never studied computer science, would never have thought of it, and when the word “algorithm” came up, she briefly closed her eyes inwardly.

We sat together, and I asked her: What is the most annoying task in your working week?

She thought for a moment. Then she said: “The summaries after every client conversation. I always write them myself, they cost me half an hour, and I find them terrible.”

I opened an AI tool with her. I asked her to paste in the notes from her last conversation and to ask the tool for a structured summary.

It took thirty seconds.

Anne read. Was silent. Read again.

Then she said quietly:

This is better than what I would have written in half an hour.

It was not a big moment. No revelation. No turning point.

It was a small, concrete moment in which an annoying task suddenly was none.

But it was Anne's first step.

And three months later she was using AI in almost every area of her work. Not because she had suddenly become a technology enthusiast. But because this first small step had shown her: It works. And it is for me.

* * *

I want to talk about something that holds many women back, even if they rarely name it this way:

The inner resistance to being seen while learning.

It is a very specific blockade. Not the one before failing, that one is better known, better named. But the boundary that arises when you do not yet know. When you ask questions that may be "obvious". When you stumble before you walk.

In male dominated rooms this boundary is especially noticeable. Because not knowing is often read as weakness there, and women know from experience that not knowing is forgiven less in them.

This is not imagination. This is a learned, rational answer to a real experience.

But here is what this resistance costs:

> *Whoever does not want to be seen while learning has to learn alone. And whoever learns alone learns more slowly, and gives up sooner.*

The way out is not to overcome the blockade.

The way out is to find a room in which it is no longer needed.

A room in which not knowing is not a weakness but the starting point.

A room in which other women are learning too, and you see each other doing it.

* * *

What makes a good first step?

I have thought about this for a long time, from my own experience and from accompanying many women.

It is not the steps that impress the most. It is the steps that fit best.

A good first step has three qualities:

It is concrete. Not “I want to become more digital”, but “Today I ask one question in an AI tool.” Concrete means: this evening you know whether you did it or not.

It is small enough. Not the biggest possible step, the smallest possible one that is still a step. Small steps get taken. Big ones get planned.

It is useful for you. Not what others find sensible. What takes an annoying task off your plate today, answers a question, opens a door. AI that is useful to you is AI you will use again.

That is all.

No program. No course. No master plan.

One concrete, small, useful step.

And then the next.

* * *

I want to be honest about something that is often glossed over in guidebooks:

The first step will not always feel good.

Sometimes it will feel uncomfortable. Sometimes it will not work. Sometimes the tool will give an answer that confuses instead of enlightens. Sometimes you will ask yourself after the step whether you did the right thing.

That is normal.

That is learning.

The difference between someone who develops a new skill and someone who gives up does not lie in one having more talent or fewer difficulties.

It lies in what you do when the step does not feel good.

The inner glass ceiling whispers in these moments: You see? You are not made for this. I was right.

What helps then is not willpower.

What helps is knowing that this moment is part of the way. And the community of women who experience the same thing in the same moment, and keep going.

> *Failing is not a sign that you are wrong. It is a sign that you are learning.*

* * *

I am also writing this chapter as an invitation.

An invitation to use the first hour of my accompaniment offer.

Not because I think you need help.

But because I know the first step is easier when someone is standing beside you.

Not to take it for you. But to witness that you take it.

In my free hour, “Mutig Digital”, we do exactly that:

We name what holds you back. We open a tool together. You take one concrete, small, useful step, in front of other women who are doing the same.

No course promise. No miracle cure.

Only the first step, taken together.

Because it becomes easier that way.

* * *

At the beginning of this book I spoke of waves.

Of the sea that moves. Of waves that come before you see them. Of the decision to start running before the wave is there.

I have surfed many waves in my life. None of them was a triumph from the first moment. Each began with an uncertain, half finished, not yet knowing first step.

And each of these waves gave me something the previous one could not give.

Not because I was especially brave.

But because I had understood:

> *The wave does not wait for the ready. It waits for those who run.*

The AI wave is the biggest I have ever seen. It comes fast. It comes changing. It comes whether we are ready or not.

But it carries us only if we are on it.

You do not have to surf all waves at once.

You only have to see this one.

And start to run.

Epilogue

An Invitation to Insight

For all who recognize themselves

> *Every wave ends at the shore. But the sea remains. And the next wave is already on its way.*

* * *

I am sitting by the sea.

Not metaphorically. Really. I am sitting on a beach, and the water moves in front of me in that eternal rhythm that is never quite the same and never quite different.

I am thinking of you.

Of the woman who has read this book. Of what you take with you, and of what perhaps weighs even more: what you have recognized.

Because this book is ultimately not about technology. It is about recognition.

The recognition of the inner voice that says “Not yet”.

The recognition of waiting as a pattern, not as reason.

The recognition of your own strengths, which were always there, even if you had not yet given them a name.

* * *

This book grew out of my life.

Not out of a theory. Not out of a concept I made up. Out of four decades in the ups and downs of technological waves, out of the quiet moments of doubt, out of the surprises of breakthrough, out of the deep change that Claire Zammit's work triggered in me.

I wrote what I would have needed.

As a young woman in a Stuttgart computer science office, who sensed that something about this PC was special, but did not yet have the language for what she sensed.

As a mother who ran toward a Java wave while the inner voice asked: Really? Now? Are you sure?

As a trainer who experienced hepeating for the first time and did not know what to do with it.

As a woman who learned late: the ceiling that limits me does not hold itself up. I hold it.

And as a woman who learned to let go of it.

* * *

I want to give you three things you can carry out of this book.

Not as a list. As promises.

The first: You are not too late. In the history of technology there is no example of “too late”, there is only “not yet started”. Every wave needed latecomers as much as pioneers. What distinguishes them is not the timing. It is the decision.

The second: The inner glass ceiling is not you. It is a pattern, learned, understandable, once meaningful. And like everything learned, it can change. Not through willpower. Through understanding, through accompaniment, through the courage to look at it instead of looking away.

The third: You need other women. Not because you cannot do it alone. But because certain parts of you unfold only when other women witness them. That is not a weakness. That is how feminine strength works. Not despite community, but through it.

* * *

The AI wave is the biggest I have seen in my career.

I do not say this to create awe. I say it because I believe it, and because I believe you are needed on this wave.

Not as an expert.

Not as someone who knows everything.

As a woman with her very own perspective, her very own intuition, her very own way of asking questions and seeing connections.

AI systems learn from us. From the people who work with them, who shape them, who teach them what matters. When women are missing, these systems learn a world without half of its wisdom.

That is not meant dramatically.

It is simply true.

> *The future of technology will be shaped by those who start now. I want you to be part of it.*

* * *

I am still sitting by the sea.

A wave runs toward the beach. I watch it, how it arises far out as a barely noticeable change of the water surface. How it grows. How it takes shape.

And then, just before it reaches the beach, I see someone run into the water.

Not elegantly. Not perfectly. With a brief hesitation at the edge, a deep breath, and then: go.

The wave lifts her. Carries her. For a moment everything is possibility.

That is what I wish for you.

Not the perfect start.

Not the flawless surf.

But this one moment, in which you run. In which you take the wave. In which you feel that it carries.

* * *

Dear reader,

You have read this book. That means something.

It means that you consider the questions it asks relevant to you. That you are ready to look. That something in you wants more, even if another

voice in you says: Not yet. Not ready yet. Not good enough yet.

I do not believe this other voice.

I believe the woman who has read this book to this point.

I have been traveling on technology waves for over four decades. I have known imposter syndrome from the inside, in all its variations, in all its clever disguises. I have learned not to fight it away, but to understand it.

I am trained in the method of Claire Zammit, a researcher who has dedicated her life to understanding what holds women back. And I have combined this method with what I learned in the world of technology.

This combination is my work.

And you are invited to be a part of it.

Not with a long program. Not with a big decision.

With one hour.

“Mutig Digital”, my free live session, is the place where this first step is taken together. With women who ask themselves similar questions. In a room in which not knowing is not a flaw but the starting point.

It is not worth waiting until the world changes.

The world changes, it just does not wait for us.

Come.

The wave is here.

About the Author

* * *

Uta Kapp is a computer scientist, trainer and coach with more than four decades of experience on the front lines of technological change. From the first PCs of the 1980s through the internet and agile ways of working to artificial intelligence, she was always early, almost always as one of the few women in the room.

Trained in Feminine Power and Woman Centered Coaching according to Dr. Claire Zammit, she combines deep technical expertise with the psychology of female potential. Her mission: to accompany women in dissolving the glass ceiling in the mind, and at the same time to use the tools of the digital age with courage.

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